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ADDRESS

TO

THE GRADUATES

OF THE

SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE,

AT THE

PUBLIC COMMENCEMENT,

1830.



BY THOMAS COOPER, M. D.
President of the College.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SENIOR CLASS.

MAY, 1831.

COLUMBIA:
PRINTED BY S. J. M'MORRIS.

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN—

You are about to leave this institution, and I have a few words of advice to offer before we part. It is true, I have nothing to say that I have not said before, but it will not be the less worthy of attention. We are apt to forget and disregard what is so true as to be admitted on all hands, and assented to without hesitation. It passeth in at the one ear and goeth out at the other. A paradox will startle you and arrest attention; an axiom makes but a weak impression. All useful truths, therefore, require to be repeated; especially to young men, to whom deliberation and reflection have hitherto been a task and not a pleasure.

You are now about to *commence*, not to quit your studies. Those of you who are destined for the learned professions, will soon feel this. In the pursuits connected with those professions, the habits of attention we have hitherto forced upon you, will be inestimable, where we have been successful. The more you have been compelled to labor here, the easier will labor be to you hereafter, and you will thank us by and by, for every exertion of our authority, and every compulsory duty which you may have complained of while at College. The aim of the Faculty has been rather to earn your future than your present approbation. You are not even yet qualified to estimate the value of the discipline which the laws and practice of this institution has forced upon you. But the time will gradually approach when our endeavors will be properly valued. We have cast our bread upon the waters, it will be found again after many days.

It is the habit of mental exertion, the facility of studying, arising from constant practice, the acquired power of commanding and fixing your attention, upon which you must rely for your future reputation and success. Without this, Genius is an *ignis fatuus*: combined with it, Genius may do much indeed, for yourselves and for the world. But

mere natural talent is by no means to be set in comparison with patient, persevering industry. Genius unregulated by acquired knowledge, and practical experience, is apt to produce self conceit, hasty determination, premature and imprudent declarations of opinion, and wild and eccentric modes of thinking and of acting. It takes a course to be gazed at, but not to be followed. There is no settled union between genius and wisdom. Industry, on the other hand, is sure to find out how little we know, in comparison of what is to be known; and to confirm the wholesome persuasion, that great eminence is never acquired without great labor.

But the first of all your duties and acquirements, is to acquire really and faithfully the character of a *good man*. Irreproachable moral conduct lays at the root of all desirable excellence. It is a favorable counterbalance against inferiority in every other acquirement; and though other qualities may be desirable, this is absolutely necessary.—The praise of being a good man, conferred by good men, is the highest recompense we can receive in this world.—All of you are destined to be settled in life in the usual manner. You will marry and have families. You will then feel the great importance of the doctrine you now hear; and I pray God you may all of you leave to your children the proud portion of an irreproachable character; and exhibit in your own course of life a manifest example of the truth you have so often heard from your instructors here, that whether in private or in public life, honor and honesty are the wisest policy.

Many of you, I hope and believe, are destined to serve your country as legislators. In pursuance of the maxim I have just repeated, let me warn you against a mistake that legislators are apt to commit, in supposing that what would be disgraceful in one man as an individual, is pardonable in a hundred. That dishonesty becomes annihilated by divided responsibility. This is a very convenient doctrine where morality is considered as a thing to be moulded into any shape that convenience may require; and much of the political evils we complain of at this time, may be ascribed to its practical adoption elsewhere. We have done our best in this College to inculcate far different precepts; and to teach the important truth, that the maxims of common honesty are equally binding on nations as on individuals—on an assembly of a thousand, as on any one of the number. For

the last time I repeat these precepts to you, and I shall hope not without effect. Remember, of all courage the highest grade is *moral* courage; that which goes on straight forward to do what is right, regardless of the consequences that may result from it.

This is not a theological institution, and I rejoice that it is not. We are freed from the quarrelsome questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and are wisely left to bestow our attention on objects of more direct and practical utility. By the Constitution of South Carolina, our legislators are prohibited from intermeddling with religious subjects, or legislating on religious considerations: and so of course are all those who derive their authority under them. "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, (says our Constitution,) shall forever hereafter be allowed in this State to all mankind, *without discrimination or preference.*"

About religion, therefore, I have little to urge. While you remained members of this institution, I have always said to you, what I have always said to the Students who preceded you—that while you are under the control of your parents, it is right and it is wise in you to adopt and profess their religious tenets as your own. They may be in error; but you are quite sure that they are incapable of wilfully misleading you. Moreover, while you were here, the College duties were abundantly sufficient, if faithfully attended to, to occupy the whole of your time. But now, that you have arrived at an age when the laws of nature, and the laws of the land, set you free from parental control, and permit you to think for yourselves, take care that your religion is your own; the honest result of your own diligent and impartial inquiry. Whatever you may decide upon in this respect, let your faith be known and judged of by its fruits; by the moral worth of your character, and the habitual uprightness of your conduct. This is all that society has a right to look to. Whoever takes the liberty of inquiring beyond this, inquires impertinently. To our fellow-men we are accountable for our conduct, to no human being are we accountable for our opinions. If I tolerate what I deem the errors and heresies of my neighbor, he has no right to quarrel with me for mine.

You are about to quit the South Carolina College. Remember that the benefits of education afforded you here,

will enable you to direct all your future exertions usefully and successfully. It is to the liberality of this public institution, that you will owe in a great degree all your future eminence. Cherish then the memory of this institution; reverence the wise legislation that gave it birth; endeavor to contribute to its usefulness and promote its interests; and may your children enjoy the benefits of your exertions in its support.

Much of what you have been taught here, you will forget. The avocations of the world, the pursuits of active life, will render a continued attention to collegiate studies impracticable. You must select what will be of practical application, and abide chiefly by that. But as I have said before, the *habit* of study and attention, will be of permanent benefit, whatever your future avocations may be.

Of the studies pursued in this place, there is one which I would particularly recommend to your continued attention, whatever may be your future mode of life: it is the perusal of *ancient classic authors*. From them the moderns have acquired all that is tasteful and pleasurable in literature.—To them, we owe all the genuine precepts, and most of the purest examples of what is sublime or beautiful, chaste and elegant, in literary composition, and the arts. Nor can a correct and instructed taste, be well formed without them.

You have hitherto read these works as a task. Begin now to read them, till their language and style become easy and familiar, and you will then not cease to read them for instruction and amusement. It is the fashion in modern days, among those who do not possess classical learning, to decry it. Those who can read a classic author with ease, are never among the enemies of classical acquirement. In this opinion I follow the great majority of the greatest men in science and in politics, that the world has produced. If I err, it is in the best company.

But as an opinion seems gaining ground, that classical literature is cultivated at our seminaries of education to the exclusion of more valuable knowledge, and that the years dedicated to it, are years wasted, it may be proper to suggest a few among the arguments that may be used in defence of the common practice.

The philosophy of the Greek and Latin languages is so intimately connected with the philosophy of language in general—an accurate knowledge of the grammatical con-

struction of those languages, leads so directly to an accurate knowledge of the structure of all the European languages—these last are so made up of, and blended with the languages of the ancient classics, that the knowledge of Greek and Latin is the high road, and the shortest road to an accurate knowledge of our own and every language of Europe.

Add to this, that the best writers of our own and of every other European language, have so many allusions, direct and indirect, to *ancient* classic authors, that we cannot peruse the classic authors of *modern* times to full advantage, without a reasonable acquaintance with the ancient classics. Nor can we trace the history of almost any literary question without reference to ancient authors. Nor can we derive any knowledge (imperfect as it all is) of the more ancient inhabitants of the earth, and the progress of civilization, except from the historians who have written in Greek and Latin. Nor is there any author of great repute since the revival of letters, on mathematical, scientific, medical, or botanical subjects—on the civil law, the law of nature and nations—on the principles of ethics or metaphysics—who is not deeply indebted to the classic languages, or who has not delivered his own doctrines in the ancient language of Rome. Even at the present day, the Latin language is as much in use as the language of science and literature in Germany, as the German language itself. Indeed, from the many transactions of literary societies throughout Europe, composed either in Latin as in Petersburg, Sweden, Leipsic; or in English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, or Swedish, on which one person can peruse with sufficient understanding, we are in a fair way to be driven ultimately to the adoption of the Latin as the universal language of science and of scientific men.

Moreover, of the books usually put into the hands of our republican youth, the Greek and Latin classics alone are adapted to impress republican sentiments, a hatred of tyranny and oppression, and to exhibit the manifold advantages of a free government, and the necessity of a well regulated popular control over persons in authority. Even the history of modern states, and the books of mere amusement, such as the plays and novels of the British press, are so full of Kings and Princes, Lords and Ladies, of high born men, and high born women, and the great importance of high titles and exuberant wealth, and so crowded with the ad-

ventures of aristocracy, so adapted to the manners and fashions of the idlers and butterflies of society, that our taste would be debauched by these pictures, if our earlier education had not received a wholesome bias from the plain republican narrations of the Greek and Roman writers.

These are reasons why I think we cannot yet dispense with a classical education for men of reasonable fortune, or for those who are devoted to the liberal arts, or to any literary avocation. To say that a knowledge of Greek and Latin, would advance the pursuits of a brick layer, a cheese monger, or a tavern keeper, would be manifestly absurd; but this knowledge must, for a long time to come, form the ground work of what is called a liberal education.

Another most important branch of the studies you have been taught here, I earnestly recommend to your continued attention; because the events of every day, every legislative transaction, every discussion in the company of persons belonging to good society, will require the knowledge I am now recommending. For to all these, the plain, common sense principles of *Political Economy* will apply, and become an absolutely necessary part of the information expected not merely to be found among you, but familiar to all of you. The science of political economy is of recent origin: it begins now to be better understood, and therefore more highly appreciated than formerly. Out of Great Britain, it has formed no part of the preliminary education of those who now rule the destinies of nations. I have little hopes, therefore, of the politicians of the old school, who are now in the seat of power; too wise to improve by knowledge so modern, or to adopt maxims that have forced themselves into notice, since the time of their entrance on the busy scenes of public life. Such are the rulers who exemplify the known remark, *quam parva sapientia regitur mundus*. Before the useful principles of modern improvement can be brought into full play, these men, their ignorance, their selfishness, and their prejudices, must die away. This observation indeed, might have been made with truth, every where and at all times: it is still true (with a few late exceptions) in every country in Europe, and it is not less true in this. Thank God, old men are not destined to live forever in this world. The improvements that take place, take place always by means of the rising generation; who as yet, untrammelled by deep-rooted prejudices, and not

worshipping implicitly the wisdom of their ancestors, will often regard as worthy of adoption, the bold doctrines of a former age. Doctrines, for which some of their immediate predecessors were content to suffer the world's obloquy, and the taunts, the reproaches, and the persecutions of those who thrive on public credulity. The devoted enquirers after truth, wherever she is to be found—those who are ambitious to contribute to human improvement, and to rank themselves among the causes and instruments of permanent good to their fellow men—must expect this ; they must be content to devote themselves, and to bear patiently the melancholy lot, which the laws of human nature, the influence of human prejudices, and the selfish imperfections of human society, have assigned them. Those who are desirous of earning the praise of patriotism, must abide the chances that accompany it.

The march of mind, as it has been called—the improving progress of public opinion, formed and based on the freedom of the press, and the unlimited right of proposing for public examination, and of fully and freely discussing any and every opinion and doctrine without exception—has done, and is still doing much indeed towards the progress of truth, and the promotion of human happiness. But it is yet trammelled and controlled here and every where, by the want of knowledge. The full value of that wise and honest maxim, *audi alteram partem*, (hear both sides) is not yet duly appreciated. Freedom of opinion and freedom of discussion, are even yet considered as criminal, in the present generation : and if truth be not fettered by the law, it is so by the imperfect state of public information. But what sound and satisfactory judgment can be formed on a controverted question, if we are denied the right of discussing it freely, and examining it under every aspect and on every side ?

At present, the march of mind, can be counted only by generations ; let it be your business to accelerate its progress—to clear away its obstacles, and enable us to calculate it by years. Remember, that truth does not depend on authority, but on ascertained fact and sound reasoning ; but it can make no progress in fetters. That man who would conceal from us, arguments adverse to his own opinions, or who would prohibit us from examining and discussing any side of any question, has no other object in view than



to commit a fraud on our understandings, and substitute his own prejudices in the place of some truth, whose operation he dreads to encounter, and whose prevalence he would willingly prevent.

In fine, rely for your success, not upon genius, but on habitual and persevering industry : call nothing wisdom, but what is based upon morality. If you cannot be rich, or great, or learned, you can be more ; each of you can become if he pleases, that noblest of the works of God, an honest man. I pray God you may all anxiously aspire to that highest and best of characters.

Such are the few parting words of advice I have to offer : receive them as a testimony of my continued friendship, and my earnest wishes for your honorable perseverance in well doing. Adieu.

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